

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN
NORTHERN DIVISION

FRANK NALI,

Plaintiff,

Case No. 2:07-cv-87

v.

Honorable Robert Holmes Bell

J. EKMAN, et al.,

Defendants.

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

This is a civil rights action brought by a state prisoner pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. The Court has granted Plaintiff leave to proceed *in forma pauperis*, and Plaintiff has paid the initial partial filing fee. Under the Prison Litigation Reform Act, PUB. L. NO. 104-134, 110 STAT. 1321 (1996), the Court is required to dismiss any prisoner action brought under federal law if the complaint is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2), 1915A; 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c). The Court must read Plaintiff's *pro se* complaint indulgently, *see Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972), and accept Plaintiff's allegations as true, unless they are clearly irrational or wholly incredible. *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. 25, 33 (1992). Applying these standards, I recommend that Plaintiff's complaint be dismissed for failure to state a claim.

Discussion

I. Factual allegations

Plaintiff Frank Nali, an inmate at the Ojibway Correctional Facility, filed this *pro se* civil rights action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983 against Defendants Nurse J. Ekman, Hearing Officer Unknown O'Brien, Investigating Officer P. Yon, Sergeant Unknown Buda, B. Flahaug, Officer Unknown Pispanen, and Officer Unknown Kellett.

Plaintiff alleges in his complaint that on April 9, 2007, Defendant Ekman wrote a false major misconduct ticket on Plaintiff for insolence. Plaintiff claims that this ticket was motivated by a desire to retaliate against Plaintiff for his prior letters of complaint to both Defendant Ekman and to health care, in which he asserted that Defendant Ekman was incompetent, lacked knowledge and experience, and indicated that he did not wish to be treated by her. Defendant Yon failed to investigate as requested by Plaintiff and Defendant O'Brien found Plaintiff guilty without any factual support for the finding. Plaintiff also states that he was denied the opportunity to present material essential to his defense. According to Plaintiff, Defendant Buda improperly reviewed the guilty finding.

Plaintiff further alleges that on March 21, 2007, Defendant Flahaug issued an out of place ticket to Plaintiff for being in the dining room without authorization. Plaintiff states that he did in fact have such authorization. Plaintiff asserts that when he entered the chow hall and began his breakfast, Defendant Buda sent Defendant Flahaug to Plaintiff's table to accost him. However, Defendant Flahaug did not know who Plaintiff was and escorted the wrong prisoner from the table. Defendant Buda then sent Defendant Flahaug back to the table to get Plaintiff. Defendant Buda then advised Defendant Flahaug to write the ticket on Plaintiff. Plaintiff claims that Defendants Yon and

O'Brien failed to allow Plaintiff to use the chow line roll call sheet to show that Plaintiff was authorized to be in the dining hall during the pertinent time period. In addition, Plaintiff states that Defendant Yon failed to investigate the ticket and that Defendant O'Brien upheld the ticket without sufficient evidence.

Plaintiff states that Defendants' conduct was retaliatory and violated Plaintiff's due process and equal protection rights. In addition, Plaintiff states that Defendants were negligent and subjected him to harassment and intentional infliction of emotional distress. Plaintiff seeks compensatory and punitive damages. In addition, Plaintiff seeks injunctive relief prohibiting Defendants from retaliating against Plaintiff for filing this lawsuit.

II. Failure to state a claim

A complaint fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted when it is clear that no relief could be granted under any set of facts that could be proved consistent with the allegations of the complaint. *Jones v. City of Carlisle*, 3 F.3d 945, 947 (6th Cir. 1993). To state a claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, a plaintiff must allege the violation of a right secured by the federal Constitution or laws and must show that the deprivation was committed by a person acting under color of state law. *West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988); *Street v. Corr. Corp. of Am.*, 102 F.3d 810, 814 (6th Cir. 1996). Because § 1983 is a method for vindicating federal rights, not a source of substantive rights itself, the first step in an action under § 1983 is to identify the specific constitutional right allegedly infringed. *Albright v. Oliver*, 510 U.S. 266, 271 (1994).

Plaintiff claims that he was falsely convicted of two retaliatory major misconducts. He also appears to claim that there was insufficient evidence to support the guilty findings. The Supreme Court has held that a claim for declaratory relief and monetary damages that necessarily

implies the invalidity of the punishment imposed is not cognizable under § 1983 until the conviction has been overturned. *Edwards v. Balisok*, 520 U.S. 641, 648 (1997) (addressing allegations of deceit and bias on the part of the decisionmaker in a misconduct hearing). The Court relied upon *Heck v. Humphrey*, 512 U.S. 477, 486-87 (1994), which held that “in order to recover damages for allegedly unconstitutional conviction or imprisonment, *or for other harm caused by actions whose unlawfulness would render a conviction or sentence invalid*, a § 1983 plaintiff must prove that the conviction or sentence has been [overturned].” *Edwards*, 520 U.S. at 646 (emphasis in original). As the Supreme Court recently has stated, “[t]hese cases, taken together, indicate that a state prisoner’s § 1983 action is barred (absent prior invalidation) – no matter the relief sought (damages or equitable relief), no matter the target of the prisoner’s suit (state conduct leading to conviction or internal prison proceedings) – *if* success in that action would necessarily demonstrate the invalidity of confinement or its duration.” *Wilkinson v. Dotson*, 125 S. Ct. 1242, 1248 (2005). Thus, where a prisoner’s claim of unfair procedures in a disciplinary hearing necessarily implies the invalidity of the deprivation of good-time credits, his claim is not cognizable under § 1983. *Id.*; *see also Bailey v. McCoy*, No. 98-1746, 1999 WL 777351, at *2 (6th Cir. Sept. 21, 1999) (collecting Sixth Circuit decisions applying *Edwards* to procedural due process challenges), *cert. denied*, 122 S. Ct. 1795 (2002). *See also Muhammad v. Close*, 540 U.S. 749 (2004) (holding that the *Heck-Edwards* bar applies to prison misconduct challenges only when good-time credits are implicated).

In *Muhammad v. Close*, 540 U.S. 749 (2004), the Supreme Court clarified that *Edwards* requires the favorable termination of a disciplinary proceeding before a civil rights action may be filed only in cases where the duration of the prisoner’s sentence is affected. *See Johnson v. Coolman*, No. 03-1909, 2004 WL 1367271, at *1 (6th Cir. June 15, 2004). In other words, *Edwards*

still applies where a plaintiff has lost good time as the result of the misconduct conviction. Under Michigan law, a prisoner loses good time credits for the month of his major misconduct disciplinary conviction. *See* MICH. COMP. LAWS § 800.33. In addition, the warden may order forfeiture of previously accumulated credits in cases. *Id.* Plaintiff does not assert that he did not forfeit good time credit for the month of his conviction. Accordingly, Plaintiff's claims regarding the allegedly false misconduct convictions remain noncognizable under § 1983 because a ruling on these claims would, if established, necessarily imply the invalidity of his disciplinary convictions. *See Shavers v. Stapleton*, No. 03-2210, 2004 WL 1303359, at *1 (6th Cir. June 9, 2004).

Furthermore, Plaintiff's complaint, as well as the attached documents, establish that if Plaintiff had a right implicating the due process protections of the Constitution, Plaintiff received due process of law. In all cases where a person stands to be deprived of his life, liberty or property, he is entitled to due process of law. This due process of law gives the person the opportunity to convince an unbiased decision maker that, for example, he has been wrongly or falsely accused or that the evidence against him is false. *Zinerman v. Burch*, 494 U.S. 113, 127-28, 110 S. Ct. 975, 984 (1990). The Due Process Clause does not guarantee that the procedure will produce a correct decision. "It must be remembered that even if a state decision does deprive an individual of life, [liberty], or property, and even if that decision is erroneous, it does not necessarily follow that the decision violated that individual's right to due process." *Martinez v. California*, 444 U.S. 277, 284, n.9, 100 S. Ct. 553, 558, n. 9 (1980). "[T]he deprivation by state action of a constitutionally protected interest in 'life, liberty or property' is not in itself unconstitutional; what is unconstitutional is the deprivation of such an interest *without due process of law*." *Zinerman*, 494 U.S. at 125, 110 S. Ct. at 983 (1990) (emphasis in original). Further, an inmate has no right to counsel in disciplinary

proceedings. *Wolff v. McDonnell*, 418 U.S. 539, 569-70, 94 S. Ct. 2963, 2981 (1974); *Franklin v. Aycock*, 795 F.2d 1253, 1263 (6th Cir. 1986).

In addition, Plaintiff's assertion that Defendants' conduct violated his right to equal protection is entirely conclusory. The Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment provides that a state may not "deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws," which is essentially a direction that all persons similarly situated should be treated alike. U.S. CONST., amend. XIV; *City of Cleburne v. Cleburne Living Center, Inc.*, 473 U.S. 432, 439 (1985). Plaintiff's allegations on this point are wholly conclusory. He merely states that Defendants are white and he is of a different race. Plaintiff provides no specific factual allegations to support his equal protection claim. Conclusory allegations of unconstitutional conduct without specific factual allegations fail to state a claim under § 1983. *See Lillard v. Shelby County Bd. of Educ.*, 76 F.3d 716, 726 (6th Cir.1996); *Chapman v. City of Detroit*, 808 F.2d 459, 465 (6th Cir.1986); *Smith v. Rose*, 760 F.2d 102, 106 (6th Cir.1985); *Turnboe v. Stegall*, No. 00-1182, 2000 WL 1679478, at *2 (6th Cir. Nov. 1, 2000), *cert. denied*, 121 S. Ct. 1616 (2001).

The undersigned recommends that Plaintiff's claim that Defendants harassed him by accosting him in the chow hall be dismissed. Claims of abusive language, or of general harassment, do not state an eighth amendment or substantive due process violation. *Ivey v. Wilson*, 832 F.2d 950 (6th Cir. 1987); *Ishaaq v. Compton*, 900 F. Supp. 935, 944 (W.D. Tenn., 1995); *Meadows v. Gibson*, 855 F. Supp. 223, 225 (W.D. Tenn., 1994); *Banks v. Klapish*, 717 F. Supp. 520 (W.D. Mich. 1989); *Gilson v. Cox*, 711 F. Supp. 354 (E.D. Mich. 1989); *Rahman v. Stephenson*, 626 F. Supp. 886, 888 (W.D. Tenn. 1986). Even the occasional or sporadic use of racial slurs, although unprofessional and

reprehensible, does not rise to a level of constitutional magnitude. *See, Torres v. County of Oakland*, 758 F.2d 147, 152 (6th Cir. 1985).

Finally, the undersigned notes that Plaintiff's claims of "negligence" and "intentional infliction of emotional distress" do not implicate federal law. To the extent that Plaintiff is claiming his state law rights were violated, it is recommended that this court refuse to exercise pendent jurisdiction over such claims. Claims raising issues of state law are best left to determination by the state courts, particularly in the area of prison administration. In addition, pendent jurisdiction over state law claims cannot be exercised after all federal claims have been dismissed. *United Mine Workers v. Gibbs*, 383 U.S. 715, 726-727, 86 S. Ct. 1130, 1139 (1966); *Moon v. Harrison Piping Supply, et al.*, 465 F.3d 719, 728 (6th Cir. 2006); *Smith v. Freland*, 954 F.2d 343, 348 (6th Cir.), *cert. denied*, 504 U.S. 915, 112 S. Ct. 1954 (1992).

That power need not be exercised in every case in which it is found to exist. It has consistently been recognized that pendent jurisdiction is a doctrine of discretion, not of plaintiff's right. Its justification lies in considerations of judicial economy, convenience and fairness to litigants; if these are not present a federal court should hesitate to exercise jurisdiction over state claims, even though bound to apply state law to them, *Erie R. Co. v. Tompkins*, 304 U.S. 64, 58 S. Ct. 817, 82 L. Ed. 1188. Needless decisions of state law should be avoided both as a matter of comity and to promote justice between the parties, by procuring for them a surer-footed reading of applicable law. Certainly, if the federal claims are dismissed before trial, even though not insubstantial in a jurisdictional sense, the state claims should be dismissed as well. Similarly, if it appears that the state issues substantially predominate, whether in terms of proof, of the scope of the issues raised, or of the comprehensiveness of the remedy sought, the state claims may be dismissed without prejudice and left for resolution to state tribunals.

United Mine Workers v. Gibbs, 383 U.S. 715, 726-727, 86 S. Ct. 1130, 1139 (1966).

Recommended Disposition

Having conducted the review now required by the Prison Litigation Reform Act, I recommend that Plaintiff's complaint be dismissed for failure to state a claim pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2) and 1915A(b), and 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c). Should this report and recommendation be adopted, the dismissal of this action will count as a strike for purposes of 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g).

I further recommend that the Court find no good-faith basis for appeal within the meaning of 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(3). *See McGore v. Wrigglesworth*, 114 F.3d 601, 611 (6th Cir. 1997).

/s/ Timothy P. Greeley

TIMOTHY P. GREELEY

UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE

Dated: June 4, 2007

NOTICE TO PARTIES

Any objections to this Report and Recommendation must be filed and served within ten days of service of this notice on you. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(C); FED. R. CIV. P. 72(b). All objections and responses to objections are governed by W.D. Mich. LCivR 72.3(b). Failure to file timely objections may constitute a waiver of any further right of appeal. *United States v. Walters*, 638 F.2d 947 (6th Cir. 1981); *see Thomas v. Arn*, 474 U.S. 140 (1985).